

Mr. Bishop (GA). Madame Speaker, once again the month of February is upon us and we take a moment to look back. We look back and remember the fighters, the marchers, and the dreamers. We look back and remember those who marched on when they were told to stand down, and who remained seated when they were told to get up. We pay tribute to those heroes whose voices are heard across the generations, and to those heroes whose defiant silence rings louder than any word can be spoken. It is Black History Month. It is a month of solemn remembrance; and a month of exuberant hope.

So let us look back to remember and to honor those who refused to allow the status quo to hold this nation back from the fulfillment of its promise. Let us honor the ordinary slave, who embraced extraordinary courage to flee his oppressors and help maintain our union; the airman who fought and died for a country whose promise was not yet his, but who refused to stop believing what it could become; the preacher's son from Georgia, who dared to march and dared to dream; and the funny-named son of a Kenyan man and a Kansas woman who asked a nation what it wanted to become. Let us take this opportunity to remember these people, and the countless others who struggled by their side, honoring them with humility and gratitude.

Yet, also as we celebrate this month of remembrance, there is a principle that must not be forgotten: let us look back in order to honor the struggles and celebrate the triumphs of African-Americans throughout our history, but let us not forget that those struggles were endured and those triumphs attained so that we may look forward. These heroes of the past fought for that right. That right to look forward towards a future brighter than the past, filled with the opportunities that give our nation so much promise. If we wish to continue the progress towards our forbearers' vision we must never forget this crucial principle.

Furthermore, it is this principle of looking forward which makes this Black History Month so different from the rest. This Black History Month we see, for the first time, the unequivocal results of more than two hundred years of looking forward, of more than two hundred years of fighting for the hope of tomorrow, and of struggling for the promise of the future. We see this in our new president, who embodies not only everything so many before him have struggled for, but everything we continue to strive for. As President Obama himself has said, "What we have already achieved gives us hope - the audacity to hope - for what we can and must achieve tomorrow."

Thus, Madame Speaker I would like to leave my colleagues and the American people with what I believe to be the fundamental purpose of Black History Month: to look back, to the heroes and happenings of the past, so that we and our children may look forward to a future of greater promise, greater justice, and greater opportunity than has ever been previously imagined.